

Message Text

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SUBJ: POSITION OF FONMIN KHADDAM AND SYRIAN PERCEPTION OF ME
SITUATION

1. SUMMARY: KHADDAM'S POSITION IN SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IS SOLID AND PERHAPS EVEN STRONGER THAN IT WAS IN MARCH. HIS MEDIATORY ROLE IN LEBANON HAS ADDED TO HIS PRESTIGE. SYRIA SEES ITSELF STRONGER BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. LEADERSHIP HAS ENHANCED APPRECIATION OF DIFFICULTIES OF GENEVA ROUTE AND INDISPENSABILITY OF US INVOLVEMENT IN ANY PEACE PROCESS. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE SECRETARY'S MARCH VISIT TO DAMASCUS KHADDAM'S POSITION WITHIN SYRIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE HAS BEEN REAFFIRMED AND PROBABLY STRENGTHENED. AT BAATH PARTY CONGRESS HE WAS RE-ELECTED TO REGIONAL BAATH COMMAND FOR NEW FOUR YEAR TERM THOUGH OTHER LUMINARIES, SUCH AS PRIMIN AYYOUBI AND AIR FORCE COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL, WERE DROPPED. WHILE PARTY CONGRESS CRITICIZED PERFORMANCE OF SEVERAL MINISTERS, KHADDAM FROM ALL REPORTS EMERGED WITHOUT CRITICISM.

3. IN INTERNATIONAL SPHERE, IN ADDITION TO ANOTHER TOUR TO SAUDI ARABIA AND GULF CAPITALS, KHADDAM VISITED MOSCOW APRIL 23-25, BONN MAY 12-14 AND LEBANON TWICE: MAY 25-27 AND JUNE 16-17. HIS ROLE AS MEDIATOR IN LEBANESE CRISIS HAS INCREASED HIS STANDING AND PRESTIGE IN AREA.

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4. SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT SITUATION ARE FIRST THAT

INDISPENSABILITY OF CENTRAL US ROLE IN ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT PROCESS HAS BEEN CONFIRMED. VISITS OF ARAB LEADERS TO MOSCOW IN APRIL AND SUBSEQUENT BACKING OFF OF SOVIET UNION FROM ITS EFFORTS TO CONVENE GENVA CONFERENCE HAVE HELPED BRING HOME TO SYRIANS THAT CONVENING GENEVA WILL BE DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED PROCESS AT BEST WITH SCANT CHANCE OF SUCCESS UNLESS PROCESS HAS FULL US SUPPORT.

5. MEANWHILE, SYRIA SEES ITSELF AS STRONGER IN AN AREA SENSE THAN IT WAS IN MARCH. ASAD HAS MET TWICE WITH SADAT AND APPEARS CONFIDENT THAT SADAT WILL NOT AGREE TO A PARTIAL SETTLEMENT THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE SYRIA AS WELL. RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS FROM BOTH ISRAEL AND EGYPT HAVE MENTIONED NECESSITY OF NEGOTIATIONS ON NORTHERN FRONT AS WELL AS SOUTHERN ONE. IN ADDITION, SYRIA'S POSITIVE ROLE IN HELPING SOLVE LEBANESE CRISIS AND ITS STRENGTHENING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH JORDAN HAVE HELPED ESTABLISH FOUNDATION FOR GREATER POLITICAL AND PERHAPS EVEN MILITARY COOPERATION IN FUTURE. JOINT COMMANDS WITH PLO DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE PROGRESSED, BUT ASAD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP APPEARS SOLID. WITH PALESTINIANS UNCERTAIN ABOUT THEIR FUTURE STATUS IN LEBANON, THEIR DEPENDENCE ON SYRIA HAS BECOME EVEN STRONGER.

6. ECONOMICALLY, SYRIA SEES ITS POSITION IMPROVING. RAINS IN LATE APRIL PRESAGE SATISFACTORY GRAIN HARVESTS AND A NUMBER OF NEW ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS, WITH FRANCE, WEST GERMANY, KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA AS WELL AS US HAVE RAISED HOPES FOR ACCELERATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. LATEST IMF REVIEW GAVE SYRIA GOOD MARKS IN LIBERALIZING ECONOMY AND ATTRACTING BACK SYRIAN CAPITAL THAT HAD FLED IN SIXTIES.

7. CONFIDENCE THAT SYRIA WILL SUCCEED IN ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS HAS SPILLED OVER INTO POLITICAL ARENA AS WELL. WITH UNDOF EXTENSION DEMONSTRATING SYRIA'S DESIRE FOR PEACE, VIEW IS PREVALENT HERE THAT US RE-ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SETTLEMENT PROCESS HAS GOOD CHANCE OF PRODUCING POSITIVE RESULTS.
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